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6 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
7 DISTRICT OF NEVADA

8 DEMETRIOUS STEWART,)

3:16-cv-00046-MMD-WGC

9 Plaintiff,)

ORDER

10 vs.)

Re: ECF No. 27

11 E.K. MCDANIEL, *et al.*,)

12 Defendants.)
13

14 Before the court is Defendants' Motion for Leave to File Medical Records Under Seal (ECF No.
15 27).

16 In this motion, Defendants seek to file under seal an exhibit supporting their motion for summary
17 judgment that contains Plaintiff's medical records.

18 "Historically, courts have recognized a general right to inspect and copy public records and
19 documents, including judicial records and documents." *See Kamakana v. City and County of Honolulu*,
20 447 F.3d 1172, 1178 (9th Cir. 2006) (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). "Throughout our
21 history, the open courtroom has been a fundamental feature of the American judicial system. Basic
22 principles have emerged to guide judicial discretion respecting public access to judicial proceedings.
23 These principles apply as well to the determination of whether to permit access to information contained
24 in court documents because court records often provide important, sometimes the only, bases or
25 explanations for a court's decision." *Oliner v. Kontrabecki*, 745 F.3d 1024, 1025 (9th Cir. 2014)
26 (quoting *Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. v. F.T.C.*, 710 F.2d 1165, 1177 (6th Cir. 1983)).

27 Documents that have been traditionally kept secret, including grand jury transcripts and warrant
28 materials in a pre-indictment investigation, come within an exception to the general right of public

1 access. *See Kamakana*, 447 F.3d at 1178. Otherwise, “a strong presumption in favor of access is the
2 starting point.” *Id.* (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). “The presumption of access is ‘based
3 on the need for federal courts, although independent—indeed, particularly because they are
4 independent—to have a measure of accountability and for the public to have confidence in the
5 administration of justice.’” *Center for Auto Safety v. Chrysler Group, LLC*, 809 F.3d 1092, 1096 (9th
6 Cir. 2016), *cert. denied*, 137 S.Ct. 38 (Oct. 3, 2016) (quoting *United States v. Amodeo (Amodeo II)*, 71
7 F.3d 1044, 1048 (2nd Cir. 1995); *Valley Broad Co. v. U.S. Dist. Court-D. Nev.*, 798 F.2d 1289, 1294
8 (9th Cir. 1986)).

9 There are two possible standards a party must address when it seeks to file a document under
10 seal: the compelling reasons standard or the good cause standard. *See Center for Auto Safety*, 809 F.3d
11 at 1096-97. Under the compelling reasons standard, “a court may seal records only when it finds ‘a
12 compelling reason and articulate[s] the factual basis for its ruling, without relying on hypothesis or
13 conjecture.” *Id.* (quoting *Kamakana*, 447 F.3d at 1179). “The court must then ‘conscientiously balance[
14] the competing interests of the public and the party who seeks to keep certain judicial records secret.’”
15 *Id.* “What constitutes a ‘compelling reason’ is ‘best left to the sound discretion of the trial court.’” *Id.*
16 (quoting *Nixon v. Warner Comm., Inc.*, 435 U.S. 589, 599 (1978)). “Examples include when a court
17 record might be used to ‘gratify private spite or promote public scandal,’ to circulate ‘libelous’
18 statements, or ‘as sources of business information that might harm a litigant’s competitive standing.’”
19 *Id.* (quoting *Nixon*, 435 U.S. at 598-99).

20 *Center for Auto Safety* described the good cause standard, on the other hand, as the exception to
21 public access that had been applied to “sealed materials attached to a discovery motion unrelated to the
22 merits of a case.” *Id.* (citing *Phillips ex rel. Estates of Byrd v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 307 F.3d 1206, 1213-
23 14 (9th Cir. 2002)). “The ‘good cause language comes from Rule 26(c)(1), which governs the issuance
24 of protective orders in the discovery process: ‘The court may, for good cause, issue an order to protect
25 a party or person from annoyance, embarrassment, oppression, or undue burden or expense.’” *Id.* (citing
26 Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c)).

27 The Ninth Circuit has clarified that the key in determining which standard to apply in assessing
28 a motion for leave to file a document under seal is whether the documents proposed for sealing

1 accompany a motion that is “more than tangentially related to the merits of a case.” *Center for Auto*
2 *Safety*, 809 F.3d at 1101. If that is the case, the compelling reasons standard is applied. If not, the good
3 cause standard is applied.

4 Here, Defendants seek to file an exhibit under seal in connection with their motion for summary
5 judgment which is unquestionably “more than tangentially related to the merits of a case.” Therefore,
6 the compelling reasons standard applies.

7 This court, and others within the Ninth Circuit, have recognized that the need to protect medical
8 privacy qualifies as a “compelling reason” for sealing records. *See, e.g., San Ramon Regional Med. Ctr.,*
9 *Inc. v. Principal Life Ins. Co.*, 2011 WL89931, at *n.1 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 10, 2011); *Abbey v. Hawaii*
10 *Employers Mut. Ins. Co.*, 2010 WL4715793, at * 1-2 (D. HI. Nov. 15, 2010); *G. v. Hawaii*, 2010 WL
11 267483, at *1-2 (D.HI. June 25, 2010); *Wilkins v. Ahern*, 2010 WL3755654 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2010);
12 *Lombardi v. TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp.*, 2009 WL 1212170, at * 1 (D.Ariz. May 4, 2009). This
13 is because a person’s medical records contain sensitive and private information about their health. While
14 a plaintiff puts certain aspects of his medical condition at issue when he files an action alleging
15 deliberate indifference to a serious medical need under the Eighth Amendment, that does not mean that
16 the entirety of his medical records filed in connection with a motion (which frequently contain records
17 that pertain to unrelated medical information) need be unnecessarily broadcast to the public. In other
18 words, the plaintiff’s interest in keeping his sensitive health information confidential outweighs the
19 public’s need for direct access to the medical records.

20 Here, the referenced exhibit contains Plaintiff’s sensitive health information, medical history,
21 and treatment records. Balancing the need for the public’s access to information regarding Plaintiff’s
22 medical history, treatment, and condition against the need to maintain the confidentiality of Plaintiff’s
23 medical records weighs in favor of sealing this exhibit. Therefore, Defendants’ motion (ECF No. 27)
24 is **GRANTED**.

25 DATED: September 22, 2017.

26 
27 WILLIAM G. COBB
28 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE